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SUBJECT: CHILD TRAFFICKING IN UPPER GUINEA

REF A. CONAKRY 00220
REF B. CONAKRY 00196

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. While NGOs have statistics illustrating an extremely high prevalence of child trafficking on Guinea's northern border with Mali, local authorities maintain that they have not seen any child trafficking cases. Government contacts confirm previous reports that marabouts frequently cross into Mali taking large groups of children for Koranic studies. Sources also corroborate Embassy information that Kankan is a platform for child trafficking to neighboring countries and Conakry. This cable is the fifth in a series of six reports on child trafficking in Guinea. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) During a trip to the prefectures of Kankan and Siguiri (Upper Guinea) the week of June 12-17, Asst Poloff met with local authorities, police, local NGOs and border security officials to discuss the prevalence of child trafficking over Guinea's northern border with Mali. Asst Poloff also visited three villages for which Save the Children has anti-trafficking programs funded by USAID and the U.S. Department of Labor.

NGOS: HIGH INCIDENCE OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

¶3. (SBU) Asst Poloff met with local NGOs in Siguiri to discuss efforts to combat child trafficking in the region. Present at the meeting were representatives from Amical Jeune Pour le Progrhs (AJP), Jeunesse Action Developpement (JAD) and Association Jeune Volontaire Pour la Developpement (AJVD). The NGOs said they come across four to five cases of child trafficking per month at the Kouremale and Nafadji checkpoints with Mali. The NGOs also said that there have been multiple incidents of marabouts crossing into Mali with children. The NGOs reported that the majority of the marabouts have parental consent and therefore are not questioned by border security even if they are traveling with 5, 10, or 25 children.

¶4. (SBU) Save the Children coordinator, Dr. Diarra Houleymata, told Asst Poloff that her organization intercepts many victims of child trafficking on this border, but few of the alleged traffickers are arrested as many of them just "disappear." She said that from September 2007 to June 2008, Save the Children has intercepted 155 victims of child trafficking on both sides of the Guinean-Malian border. She said that they intercepted 43 victims of child trafficking in Guinea and 112 in Mali. Of the 155 children intercepted, 75% of the children were Guinean heading to Mali and 25% were Malian children heading to Guinea. She added that 80% of the Guinean children were being trafficked to Mali to work on agriculture farms, and the rest for domestic or small-scale commercial work.

EVERYONE ELSE: NO CASES OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

¶5. (SBU) In a meeting with the Prefect of Kankan, Lanceit Conde

highlighted three child trafficking concerns in his Prefecture: 1) marabouts trafficking children for exploitation in Mali, 2) young girls being trafficked from villages to Conakry for domestic work, and 3) children being trafficked to Mali and Cote d'Ivoire for child labor. He reported that children from Mali are also trafficked to Kankan, mainly for domestic servitude. When asked about details or specific cases, Mr. Conde said there have been no official cases and that he has no statistics to backup his assertions. In a separate meeting the Prefect of Mandiana Fode Camara, he said that "child trafficking could be happening here, but they wouldn't know about it," adding that it is difficult to monitor the 900km of border with Mali and Cote d'Ivoire.

16. (SBU) The Central Police Commissioner of Siguiri, Dianka Keita, said that he is in charge of the border police in the Prefecture and if any child traffickers were to be arrested he would be responsible for investigating. When asked, Mr. Keita could not recall any child recent trafficking cases and could not provide any statistics on apprehensions of child traffickers within the Prefecture. At the Kouremale border checkpoint, Deputy Police Commissioner Tona Beauvogui told Asst Poloff that if a proclaimed guardian cannot illustrate parental consent, he telephones the parents to verify parental approval for the children to travel to Mali. Mr. Beauvogui reported that they have not arrested any child traffickers at that checkpoint.

17. (SBU) In Mandiana, Asst Poloff met with Gendarme Deputy Commission Mohamed Camara. When asked about recent child trafficking cases, Mr. Camara said that they do not have any official cases and gave a few examples of kidnapping cases or missing children incidents. Asst Poloff then met with a group of transporters at a car park in Mandiana. As this is the main car park heading to Mali

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border, it encounters nearly 150 vehicles per month, most of which are heading to Mali. The group said that 100% of the cars have children and they even saw a woman with four children last night. When asked about the prevalence of a single woman or man traveling with more than five children, the transporters said that this scenario is very common, adding that they encounter it two to three times a month. The transporters said that they are not suspicious because many of the children are travelling with a relative who is taking them to live with other relatives in Mali or Cote d'Ivoire.

MORE MARABOUTS HEADING TO MALI

18. (SBU) Embassy recently reported that marabouts were arrested in Mali for allegedly trafficking 26 Guinean children (Reftel A). In a meeting with the Governor of Kankan Rene Bayo Kamano, Mr. Kamano told of another incident of marabouts allegedly trafficking 17 children aged 8-12 years old from Farranah to Mali. The governor said that in April he received a phone call from the Governor of Farranah who said that 17 children had gone missing. The parents reportedly entrusted the marabouts to teach the children in Farranah, but the marabouts were taking them to Mali instead. Mr. Kamano said that he alerted the police and gendarmes, and they apprehended the marabouts with the children at a local car park. The marabouts were sent to Farranah to be prosecuted and the children were returned to their families.

19. (SBU) Border Police Deputy Commissioner Tona Beauvogui also told Asst Poloff that the Kouremale checkpoint had a case last week of a marabout taking 15-17 children from Kissidougou to Mali for Koranic studies. He said that the marabout had parental consent so they did not investigate further. Mr. Beauvogui added that each month two to three marabouts pass through the checkpoint with children, but they usually have parental consent. When asked if he was suspicious of the intent of the marabouts traveling with such a large number of children, he said "of course, but there is nothing we can do."

SAVE THE CHILDREN PROJECTS IN LOCAL VILLAGES

¶10. (SBU) Save the Children has two U.S. funded projects focused on anti-trafficking and child exploitation in Upper Guinea. One project is funded through USAID and the other is funded through the U.S. Department of Labor. Save the Children coordinator, Dr. Diarra Houleymata, explained that children are taught skits that they show to their parents in order to educate them about 1) dangers of child labor in the mines, 2) importance of education within the village, 3) realities of entrusting someone else to take your child to Conakry, and 4) risks of sending your child with marabouts for Koranic studies. In Tatakourou village, Save the Children staff said that before the project it was very common to send children with marabouts to Bamako, but that now the village Chief refuses to let children leave with a marabout. In the village of Kiniebakoura, each year approximately 20-30 children are reportedly entrusted with "relatives" in Bamako, Conakry, Abidjan, or Kankan for employment or education. To combat potential exploitation with this practice, the village Chief has established a minimum age for sending children outside the village for education or employment.

KANKAN IS A "CHILD TRAFFICKING PLATFORM"

¶11. (SBU) During a visit to N'Zererkore (Reftel B), sources referenced Kankan as a "Child Trafficking Platform." Save the Children coordinator in Kankan, Dr. Diarra Houleymata, also used this phrase, saying that Kankan is a platform for child trafficking to Conakry and neighboring countries. She said that Save the Children conducted a survey of street children last year and the results illustrated that many children voluntarily travel to Kankan in pursuit of work with the intent of continuing on to Conakry, Liberia, or Mali, ultimately making these children extremely vulnerable to child trafficking. Dr. Houleymata gave an example of five children aged 12-14 from Loila who had come to work on the streets of Kankan. She reported that the children were approached by a woman who promised them jobs in Mali. She said the woman took an unofficial route across the border and was apprehended by police in Mali. The NGOs said that the woman was arrested, but ultimately escaped police custody.

¶12. (SBU) The Prefect of Kankan, Lanceit Conde, also told Asst Poloff that children often travel to Kankan from neighboring villages or countries looking for work. He added that this is not an end destination but a transit point for travel elsewhere. Asst Poloff then asked Mr. Conde about previous Embassy information that suggested a high prevalence of children from Kankan are being

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trafficked to Liberia. He said "of course, many people from Kankan now live in Liberia." He explained that many natives of Kankan moved to Liberia to work in diamond mines, creating cross-border communities. He continued by saying that when people return to Kankan they often take children with them to work in the mines or get an education in Liberia.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) This cable represents a continuation of Embassy efforts to understand child trafficking issues in Guinea. Embassy reporting suggests a high incidence of child trafficking over Guinea's northern border with Mali. While there have been no official cases, sources report that there is also an incidence of children being trafficked into Guinea from Mali and Cote d'Ivoire. The significant disparity between NGOs statistics on child trafficking and actual cases reported or investigated by local authorities, police and border agents is particularly concerning. According to the NGOs, 43 victims of child trafficking were intercepted in Guinea since September 2007, but no court cases were filed. As in other regions of Guinea, there seems to be some confusion as to what exactly constitutes child trafficking, and how to combat it. END COMMENT.

CARTER